



Policy Briefs

Thailand's National Parks: Making Conservation Pay

by Adis Isangkura

In Thailand, more than 80 forest reserves have been declared national parks - about 13% of the country's land area. Besides serving a vital conservation role, these parks provide valuable recreational and educational opportunities for Thais and foreign tourists.

Unfortunately, many Thai parks are under threat due to encroachment by local villagers, illegal human settlement, forest fires and soil erosion.

National parks are also threatened by pollution generated both by villages located inside the parks and by visiting tourists.

The costs of managing Thailand's national parks are met through the government's central budget, as well as by park entrance fees. But neither source provides sufficient resources to deal with the problems faced. Revenue from entrance fees is very low, since parks typically charge only five Baht per person (US\$0.13 in 1998). These fees bear no relation to park services and facilities. The central budget is also limited since it must compete with other priorities like education, public health, and military spending.

To see whether it was possible to improve the entrance fee system and so finance the conservation of the parks, EEPSEA-sponsored researcher Dr. Adis Isangkura, an economist at the Thailand Development Research Institute, set out to see just what value visitors gave to the country's national parks.

His study concentrated on three public recreational area in two national parks in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand. These were Doi Inthanon National Park, the Doi Suthep temple and the Mae Sa waterfall in the Suthep-Pui National Park. Doi Inthanon features the highest point in Thailand (2,565 metres), waterfalls, alpine meadows, hill tribe villages, caves and other attractions.

Dr. Isangkura asked people to rank four hypothetical trips in the three areas, according to their preference for various recreational attributes. These rankings were then used to calculate an appropriate entrance fee for each area.

For example, at Doi Inthanon, Dr. Israngkura proposed a 40 baht entrance fee and additional fees for specific environmentally-sensitive sites around the park. This would increase park revenue from two million to eight million Baht per year.

The study also recommended that reduced rates be given to low-income visitors such as school children on educational visits, senior citizens and the like. "Entrance fees should be adjusted to reflect the value of recreational services," explains Dr. Israngkura. "This will help raise revenue to manage and improve the facilities. It will also help ensure that the recreational services provided by the national parks will be sustained for future generations."

The study is now being used by forestry experts preparing master plans for each park. These will address such issues as human settlement within the parks, conservation, land use and tourism. Dr. Israngkura's approach may well be adopted by the National Park Authorities in setting entrance fees for all of Thailand's national parks.

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*The full text of this study is available as an EEPSEA Research Report:
Environmental Valuation: An Entrance Fee System for National Parks in Thailand - Adis Isangkura*

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